

Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the Legislative Session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

Edwin Coppoc was born near Salem, Ohio, on June 30, 1835. He was hanged December 16, 1859, having participated in the raid at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, alongside famous abolitionist John Brown.



Edwin Coppoc

Brown had spent the winter of 1857 and early spring of 1858 with the Quakers in Springdale, Iowa, home of the Coppoc brothers. Brown traveled through Springdale for the last time in February 1859. He was smuggling slaves to Canada. The Coppoc brothers, Edwin and Barclay, left Springdale on July 25, 1859, leaving their Quaker mother and abandoning their Quaker upbringing forbidding the practice of bearing arms. They joined John Brown at the Kennedy farm in Maryland. Brown had purchased the Kennedy farm. It was located about five miles north of Harper's Ferry. It was

there, under the authority of the "Provisional Constitution," that Edwin Coppoc was made a lieutenant.

On October 16, 1859, Brown proceeded to the United States Armory and Arsenal at Harper's Ferry with 22 (some sources say 21) men, including Iowans Charles Moffat, George B. Gill, Steward Taylor, Jeremiah Anderson, and Edwin and Barclay Coppoc. Of the men who followed Brown into Harper's Ferry, 10 were fatally injured or killed, five escaped, and the rest were captured. There were about a dozen militiamen wounded defending the arsenal against Brown's men, and four of the townspeople were killed.



The Kennedy farm—arsenal and mountain hideout

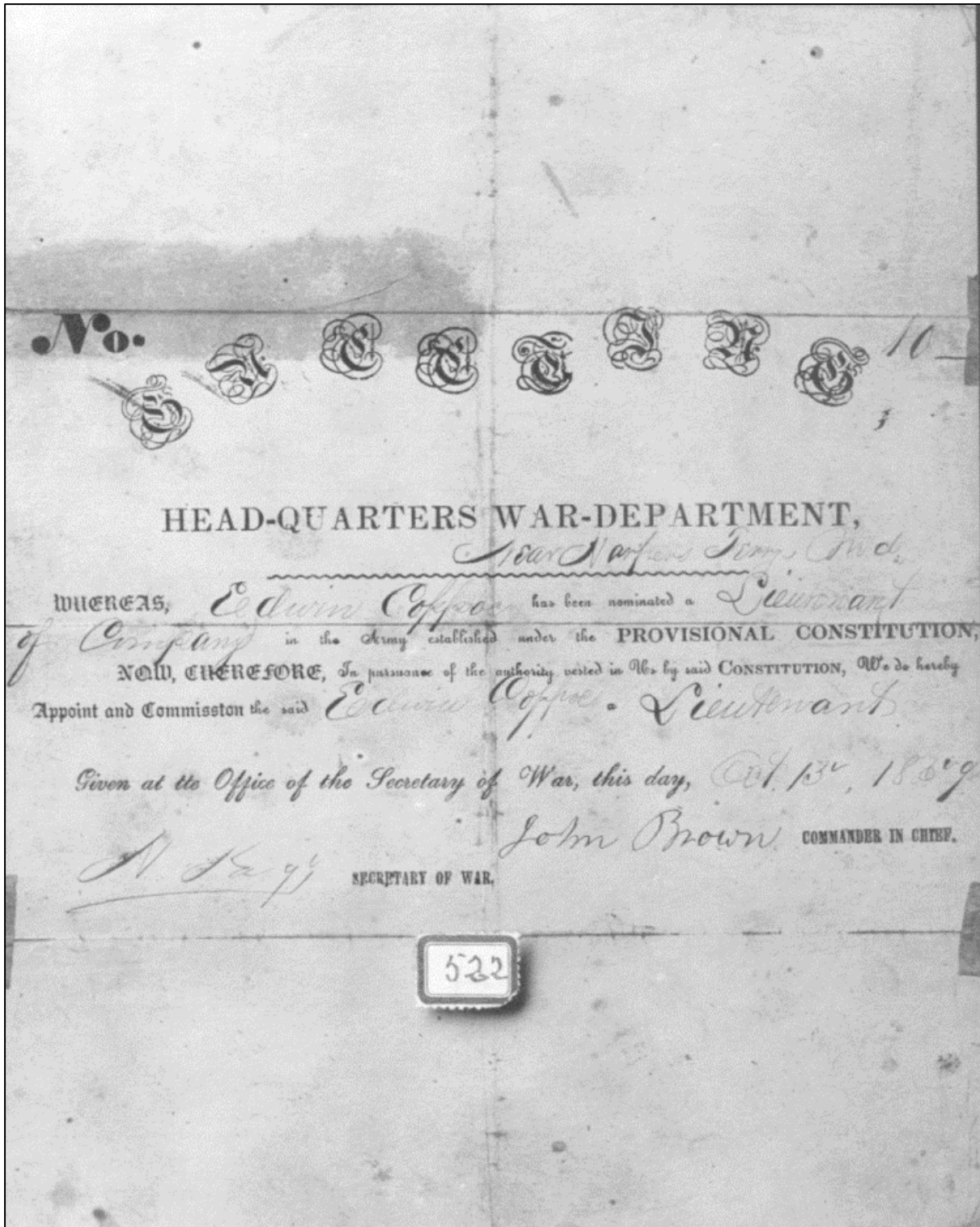
This picture and explanation is from the Palimpsest, published by the State Historical Society of Iowa, January 1960.

Barclay Coppoc continued to fight slavery in Kansas, and when the Civil War began, he was commissioned a lieutenant of the Fourth Kansas Volunteers.



Barclay Coppoc

Upon returning from a recruiting trip in Iowa, he was killed August 30, 1861, when his train fell 80 feet into the Platte River after the bridge had been burned by Missouri rebels. His body was taken to Leavenworth, Kansas, for burial, but his name was inscribed on a soldiers' monument erected at Tipton near his old home.



Certificate designating Edwin Coppoc as lieutenant, signed by John Brown
Courtesy of the Putnam Museum, Davenport, Iowa

Edwin Coppoc Letter

After Edwin was captured at Harper's Ferry, and while he spent his last days in prison, he wrote the following letter to his uncle, Joshua Coppock, in Ohio:

Joshua Coppock-Charleston, VA, Dec. 13th, 1859

My Dear Uncle:

I seat myself by the stand to write for the last time, to thee and thy family. Though far from home, and over taken by misfortune, I have not forgotten you.

Your generous hospitality towards me during my short stay with you last spring is stamped indelibly upon my heart: and also the generosity bestowed upon my poor brother, at the same time, who now wanders an outcast from his native land.

But thank God he is free, and I am thankful it is I who has to suffer instead of him. The time may come when he will remember me, and the time may come when he will still further remember the cause in which I die.

Thank God the principles of the cause in which we were engaged will not die with me and my brave comrades. They will spread wider and wider and gather strength with each hour that flows. The voice of truth will echo through our land, bringing conviction to the erring and adding numbers to that glorious army who will enlist under its banner.

The cause of everlasting truth and justice will go on "conquering and to conquer" until our broad and beautiful land shall rest beneath the banner of freedom.

I had hoped to live to see the dawn of that glorious day. I had hoped to live to see the principles of the Declaration of our Independence fully realized. I had hoped to see the dark stain of slavery blotted from our land and the libel of our boasted freedom erased: When we can say as truth that our beloved country is "the land of the free, and home of the brave-" But this cannot be. I have heard my sentence passed, my doom is sealed, but two brief days between me and eternity. At the expiration of those two days, I shall stand upon the scaffold to take my last look at earthly scenes. But that scaffold has but little dread for me; for I honestly believe I am innocent of any crime justifying such punishment. But by the taking of my life, and the lives of my comrades, Virginia is but hastening on to that glorious day, when the slave will rejoice in his freedom, when he can say that, I too am a man, and am groaning no more under the yoke of oppression. But I must now close.

Accept this short scrawl as a remembrance of me. Remember me to my relatives and friends and now farewell. From thy nephew,

Edwin Coppoc

Copy of Original Edwin Coppoc Letter

This is a copy of the handwritten letter from Edwin Coppoc to his uncle, Joshua:

Uncle Joshua Coppock

Joshua Coppock - Charleston ^{Virginia} Va, Dec. 13th 1857
My Dear Uncle:

I seat myself by the stand and write for the last time, to thee and thy family. Though far from home and overtaken by misfortune, I have not forgotten you.

Your generous hospitality towards me during my short stay with you last spring is stamped indelibly upon my heart, and also the generosity bestowed upon my poor brother, at the same time, who now wanders an outcast from his native land.

But thank God he is free, and I am thankful it is I who has to suffer instead of him. The time may come when he will remember me, and the time may come when he will still further remember the cause in which I die.

Thank God the principles of the cause in which we were engaged will not die with me and my

from comrades. They will spread
wider and wider and gather
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flows. (Flows)

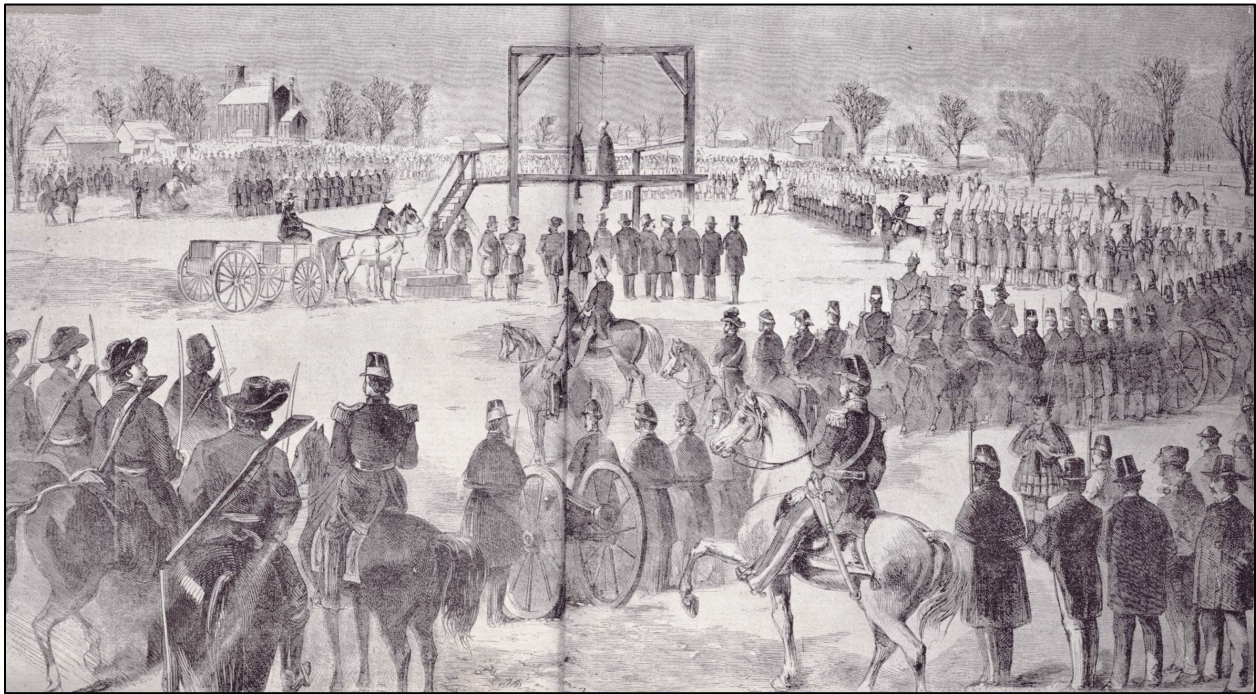
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farewell. From thy nephew,
Edwin Coppoc

Edwin Coppoc and John E. Cook were imprisoned together and hanged together on December 16, 1859. Coppoc was 24 years old.



This picture has been reduced to its present size from a double page spread measuring 14 x 20 inches, and represents a truly "lightning fast" effort back in 1859, Coppoc and Cook having been hung on December 16, and the picture appearing in the December 24, 1859, issue of *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

Our forebears were just as thrilled in 1859 with *Leslie's* feat as the present generation was with its first introduction to wirephoto and television. Generations yet unborn may witness even more phenomenal exploits in the field of communications a century hence.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

This picture and explanation is from the Palimpsest, published by the State Historical Society of Iowa, January 1960.

To learn more about the Provisional Constitution and John Brown at Harper's Ferry:

[John Brown's Provisional Constitution](#)

[Original document of John Brown's Provisional Constitution and Ordinances](#)